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CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S GUILTY MEN

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That the Czechoslovak
Provisional Government”
Stands For

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*This inside story of the
Czechoslovakian "Provisional
Government"*

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CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S GUILTY MEN

What the Czechoslovak "Provisional Government" Stands For

After months of bargaining a so-called provisional Czechoslovak Government formed by Dr. Benes was recognised by the British Government. On July 21st Lord Halifax sent a letter to Dr. Benes, in which he says:

"His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom are happy to recognise and enter into relations with the provisional Czechoslovak Government, established by the Czechoslovak National Committee to function in this country."

So the British Government are happy, and the Benes "Government" are happy, but the people of Czechoslovakia are not happy at this bargain at all.

Now, it is certain that the real meaning of this apparently innocent piece of news was not understood by the majority of those millions of ordinary citizens who heard or read it. This pamphlet is designed to make clear what really lies behind this political manoeuvre; and to show that, far from being innocent or praiseworthy, the recognition of this "provisional government" is actually directed *against* the real interests of the Czech and Slovak peoples who are fighting like grim death for their liberty.

Let us consider the events which led up to the mysterious recognition of this mysterious government.

At the end of June, a number of ships steamed into ports somewhere on the west coast of England. Aboard them, they carried a few thousand Czechoslovak soldiers, the battered remnant of the Czechoslovak division in France. Besides these soldiers, about a thousand Czechoslovak civilians arrived. Their arrival was of great importance to Dr. Benes. But of even greater importance were those who did not return, whose bones

are mouldering by the Marne and the Loire, and those who have been tortured to death in the cellars of the Gestapo. All these are on the bill which Dr. Benes presented, when he demanded official recognition from the British Government.

“Well,” you may say, “and why not? What is dishonourable about that?” But those who fell by the Marne and the Loire, those who faced the bludgeons of the Gestapo, and with them the millions of ordinary Czech and Slovak peoples at home and abroad, they know what is dishonourable about this “provisional government.” They raise an accusing finger against Czechoslovakia’s Guilty Men, against the politicians of Munich, who sent thousands of splendid, self-sacrificing men to die for interests that were not theirs. And when they condemn Benes and his followers, they are at the same time warning the British people against giving their support to those men who must share the heavy responsibility for the Munich policy. For firstly, as Lloyd George rightly stated a few months ago, it was they who originally set up a regime of national oppression in Czechoslovakia, despite all promises to the contrary. And, secondly, it was they who aided the architects of the Munich disaster, by their disgraceful submission. By their behaviour, Benes and his followers, the Czechoslovak men of Munich, have forfeited the right to speak in the name of Czechoslovak freedom. Yet it is they whom the rulers of Britain officially recognise as the Czechoslovak government.

Tragedy in France

On November 2nd, 1939, Daladier, then premier of France, made a bargain with Osusky, Czechoslovak Ambassador in Paris. By this bargain, the French authorities set about compulsorily calling-up for military service all former Czechoslovak subjects all over France. Whoever did not accede, be he the most sincere fighter for democracy, was denounced as a “friend of Hitler,” and rushed off to one or other of the numerous concentration camps established for the purpose. People from the Protectorate, who had managed to escape from the Gestapo, and were now with their families, on their way to countries overseas, were forcibly taken from the ships by the French authorities, separated from their families, and enrolled willy-nilly in the so-called Czechoslovak Army. Even cripples were enrolled, simply because there had somehow to be a number of privates corresponding proportionally to the large number of generals and other brasshats arriving from Czechoslovakia!

So, in December, 1939, this “Czechoslovak Army” was

scraped together, made up of a Czech detachment with refugee French Foreign Legion stationed in Morocco, and only a few voluntarily enlisted Czechs and Slovaks in France, besides a few hundred volunteers who arrived from the Protectorate.

M. Osusky, advocate of co-operation with Hitler, bosom friend of the notorious Municheer Bonnet, determined the character of the new army. Dr. Benes, who in the meantime had come to terms with his former political opponent, Osusky, gained the British Government's support for this military venture on December 19th, 1939. And who were its financial backers? Leaders of French capital, members of the "Two Hundred Families," the most plutocratic, most reactionary section of French society backed this venture to the hilt. Is it likely that they would have done so if this had been a genuine army of national liberation?

Actually only a small part of the money supplied to the National Committee (comprising Benes, Osusky and six other men) was spent on equipping the army. Benes' paper *Czechoslovak v Anglii* reveals in its issue of July 12th, 1940, that:

"Even the main camp in Agde had no drill-ground, so that no larger units than platoons could be trained. Our soldiers had a very hard winter. It was left to them to implement their food supply as best they could."

This admission shows how bad the situation was. But it was not only drill grounds, lodgings and catering which were insufficient. The soldiers went about in rags, they got no pay, and the majority of the officers treated them in a very high-handed manner.

Germans and Hungarians were forbidden to speak in their native tongue. When they disregarded this prohibition they were punished as "provocators." Anti-Semitism was rampant in the camps—though rather surreptitiously, since one of the Rothschilds was among the financial backers of the enterprise.

Many of the officers were incompetent, and often the common soldiers, especially those who had formerly served in the International Brigade in Spain, had far greater knowledge of modern warfare. But these able men had no access to higher commissions.

The Czechoslovak detachments were sent to the front soon after the German onslaught of the Somme. The National Committee agreed to throwing these men into battle, even though they knew the troops were by no means prepared and that a great part of them were actually physically unfit. Moreover,

the ~~Coul~~dering had publicly announced that, if captured, they would be tortured, considered not as soldiers, but as traitors.

Czechoslovak v Anglii, the Benes paper quoted above, describes the conditions under which the Czechoslovak soldiers had to fight. This is from the issue of July 12th:

"Two regiments were sent to the front, but they did not get enough ammunition. There was not even enough ammunition for the machine-guns."

This half-confession seeks to hide the real facts. Indeed, some units were sent to the front without any arms or ammunition at all. They were told that they would get all they needed when they actually reached the front. But then it transpired that either there were no arms there, or else there were only old rifles and cartridges which did not fit the magazines. The Czechoslovak soldiers were often obliged to arm themselves with guns which had been thrown away by the retreating French.

Together with the French, they retreated from the Marne to the Loire. During this retreat, which proceeded at a rate of fifty miles a day, a great part of the lorries were lost, so that about a third of the detachment had to stay behind.

When the remnants of the army reached the Seine, the bridges had already been blown up, and they were obliged to cross the river under heavy fire, either in boats or by swimming. On the Loire the irregular retreat became such a rout that the French even left the aeroplanes in the aerodromes. It was here that the Czechoslovak detachments were given the job of covering the retreat. They stayed up to the last moment, after even the Senegalese had been withdrawn. With a few machine-guns they formed a line against the German tanks. The affair ended in a terrible massacre. The Czechoslovaks were attacked from the rear and heavily defeated. Many fell into German hands.

The Czechoslovak soldiers were deeply shocked by what they had lived through in France. So bitter was their disillusionment that half of those who had the chance of embarking for England declined to do so. They preferred to stay where they were, although they knew that the Germans had threatened to treat captured Czechs, not as prisoners of war, but as traitors and rebels.

The Sequel

While the men of the Czech divisions were being shot and bayoneted, the National Committee was travelling from Paris over the whole of Western France. It finally came to rest in

Bordeaux. In Bordeaux, already overcrowded with refugees, the leaders were obsessed with only one thought—to get out of France as quickly as possible. And so these privileged gentlemen promptly obtained diplomatic visas and left. Between the 19th and 21st of June, even while many units of the Czech army were still fighting on the battlefronts, the whole of the National Committee—with the exception of two members—embarked for England.

The action of the National Committee had grave consequences in France, both for those Czechoslovaks who were interned in concentration camps, and those who were at large as free civilians. Though two of the employees of the National Committee itself were shut up in camps, though many innocent Czech men and women (members of the Czechoslovak Parliament among them) were behind bars or barbed wire in France, the National Committee did not lift a finger to help them. As they fled from France these gentlemen left hundreds of Czech anti-Nazis to their fate.

The Czechoslovak Embassy in Paris behaved in a similar way. Not merely did they give no assistance to those Czechoslovaks in Paris who were obliged to leave, but their evacuation was made even more difficult by these officials. Documents confirming “loyalty to France” were issued only to those people who could pay the fairly high fee. There were endless delays and difficulties in the ratification of identity papers, etc. The Czechoslovak civilians, abandoned in this way, were entirely helpless. Many of those who managed to escape to territory so far unoccupied were there arrested as suspicious characters by the French authorities, and held in prison till the Germans arrived. One can imagine what these people have to look forward to at the hands of the Nazis.

While the members of the National Committee were still in Bordeaux, one of them, the former minister Slavik, addressed detachments of “his” soldiers on one of the public squares. Surrounded by colonels and other high officers of the Czechoslovak army, he declared:

“In the name of the National Committee I thank all of you. Your task is ended. I am sorry to say you were not able to complete it successfully, but you did your duty. We thank you. Whoever wants to do so may stay here. The others may go with us to England or embark on whatever ship they like.”

That sounded like the dissolution of the Czechoslovak army. And so it was understood by those soldiers who embarked for

England. Similar declarations were made by officers in Béziers and Agde. Therefore the men were all the more astonished when, upon their arrival in England, they were again declared to be soldiers, were drafted into camps under military command and had the pleasure of hearing Benes announce that they were members of the reconstructed Czechoslovak Army.

The Czech soldiers in the camps in Britain were gravely dissatisfied. According to "Londoner" in the *Evening Standard* (August 15, 1940):

"There is trouble among the Czechs. Many are not satisfied with Dr. Benes' new provisional Government. They say it contains men notoriously anti-democratic in view. The new Parliament, they fear, will be of similar complexion. And Czechs of all shades of opinion are distressed by trouble in the Czech army here."

Further on, in a paragraph headed "Army Complaints," it is reported:

"A large number of Czech soldiers are in Britain. In France, where refugees were conscripted, they were 18,000 strong. Tales are told of their sufferings there: of lack of equipment and poor leadership. Dr. Benes went to see the Czech soldiers who reached England. The men criticised the number of their officers, who are in the proportion of about one to five. They alleged that Sudetens and Hungarians were forbidden to speak their own languages. Understanding was reached about sending a deputation to London. The deputation came, but it never saw Dr. Benes."

Facts of the unrest in the Czech Legion have been published in the press, notably in *Reynolds News* of August 11, 1940.

What Were These Sacrifices For?

Naturally one expects to make sacrifices in the fight for freedom. But the terrible crime of Benes and Osusky is just this: that the Czechs and Slovaks in France were made to sacrifice their lives on behalf of a French government which was not at all waging war for the freedom of the Czech and Slovak peoples. Daladier was openly plotting the restoration of the Hapsburg monarchy or, as an alternative, some Polish-Czech Federation. In either case the Czech and Slovak nations

would have been led into new bondage. For what purpose these thousands of Czech and Slovak lives have been sacrificed in France can be learned most clearly from Benes' official paper, *Czechoslovak v Anglii*, which stated on June 28th, after the overthrow of the Reynaud government:

"The men at the wheel, who led us to Munich by betraying the Franco-Czech alliance have continued their Staviskiade throughout the war and did not even spare the British Empire in their betrayal. History knows no example of such abominable conduct, there is no precedent for that malignant Fifth Column who, terrified of a political upheaval, terrified of losing their power, disheartened by the bitterness of the struggle against Hitler, have surrendered both themselves and their foreign helpers, their own allies, to the revenge of the Nazi German blood-suckers." "And nevertheless we march on with France," continues *Czechoslovak v Anglii*.

So the Czech divisions died in the service of a "malignant Fifth Column," without precedent in history. For months, it was declared to be the national duty of Czechs and Slovaks to serve these people. *Czechoslovak v Anglii* is correct in declaring that this is unprecedented. Also unprecedented, we may add, is the cynicism of the Czechoslovak National Committee led by Benes and Osusky. The phrase "And nevertheless we march on with France" is the perfect expression of this bankrupt policy.

How can all this be explained? It is a fact that the Czechoslovak National Committee was dependent not only politically, but also financially, on the French Government.

Politically speaking, the events in France only confirmed how accurate were the predictions in the pamphlet published in April, 1940, entitled *The Case for Czech Freedom*, where it was declared that Benes' policy was doomed to failure in any case, because he was in alliance with the forces of reaction, with the forces who were waging war in the interests of finance capital.

The Real Fight Against Fascism

To get the working people to support the war, their rulers have coined a lot of slogans which intimate that this is a struggle against Fascism. The recent history of the ruling class

of France, and of their Czechoslovak flunkies too, exposes this as a lie. After using fine words about fighting Nazism the ruling class in France, terrified of the prospect of genuine anti-Fascist action by the revolutionary forces of the people, opened to Hitler the gates, not only of Paris but of the whole of their country. Backed up by the Social Democratic leaders, the reactionary French Government repealed the industrial and political rights of the working class and later on the bourgeois democratic constitution, too, and established an order copied directly from Nazism. The ruling class of France did not save the nation from Fascism by means of the war. On the contrary, it was precisely by this means that they forced the people under the yoke of Fascism and foreign occupation.

The most clear-sighted among the people of Czechoslovakia foresaw all this, and therefore from the outset they opposed a policy which tied the Czech cause to the reactionary French Government.

Early in the Spring of this year, leaflets appeared in the Protectorate declaring :

“Wasted is every drop of Czechoslovak blood spilt in the interests of imperialism. We shall badly need it when our country is freed from the dictatorship of bankers, monopolists and landlords ; this freedom we shall not get from Daladier.”

These leaflets were issued by the Communists. They are organising the struggle against Nazi oppression inside the country. This is a fight centred upon the masses of the people, upon popular resistance against national and social oppression wherever it shows itself. It is led by the working class, fighting to destroy foreign domination, fighting for national freedom, fighting for a new and happy life. This fight is being waged effectively by actions which strike hard at German imperialism, hampering its war effort and aiming to drive the invaders out of the country. The methods of this struggle are not conspiratorial and adventurous, but are mass actions led by the Communist Party.

The Communist Party does not gamble with the forces of the people. Led by Communists, Czech workers in the protectorate have already realised wage increases of 20 per cent to 25 per cent, twice since the outbreak of war. In the country districts, Communists have started the formation of peasants

and workers' committees to organise the struggle of the Czech villagers against the invaders. The peasants follow the popular Communist slogan: "The Czech crop for the Czech people and nothing for the invaders."

The Communists are organising a mass movement for driving out the Nazi authorities, police and military. The Czech people, on the advice of the Communists, are explaining to the German soldiers that they are fighting, not against the people of Germany, but only against German capitalists and against Hitler. This activity is undermining the morale of German garrisons. This is the real fight for the defeat of German imperialism, for freedom and peace.

It is only the representatives of the Czech bourgeoisie who, in one way or another, turn towards the West, towards the bankrupt policy of Benes, and who maintain connections with London. But their "resistance" is of a rather comfortable kind. Outwardly, they are adapting themselves to the Nazi regime, they remain silent and wait for things to develop. In the meantime they are making as much money as possible out of the war and out of the Czech people. The whole brunt of the struggle—and the whole impact of the persecution—is being borne by the popular masses and by the Communists, who are the most faithful defenders of the rights of the people. Prominent Communist militants are in prisons and concentration camps under terrible conditions. Among them are the Parliamentary deputies, Zapotocky, Dolansky, Kopriva and Vodicka. The lawyer Dr. Ivan Sekanina died in prison. Hundreds of Communists have been killed. In the armament factories, in the Skoda works and the Brno ammunition factory, many revolutionary workers have been executed. Nevertheless the Communist Party lives on and shows the way to the people.

The Way of the Czech and Slovak Peoples

In the main, the Czech and Slovak people have turned their backs on the policy of Benes. This is borne out by the fact that less than a thousand volunteers for his military venture arrived from the Protectorate and from Slovakia during the whole course of the war. Just compare this with those thousands of volunteers from Czechoslovakia who went to

Spain three or four years ago, in spite of brutal repression by the Benes authorities. In the last war Masaryk succeeded in mobilising nearly 100,000 Czech and Slovak volunteers, without having to resort to such measures as the compulsory mobilisation which the Daladier government found necessary.

The way of the Czech and Slovak people is in absolutely the opposite direction from the way of Benes. The Czechs are fighting for their right of national self-determination, for their right of unlimited independence. The Slovaks, too, are fighting for the complete independence of their state from foreign imperialism. The Czech and Slovak peoples wish to decide alone what the mutual relations between their two nations shall be.

But Benes is fighting for something different. Benes is fighting for the restoration of the old conditions, under which working people were oppressed, under which Czech capitalists could order their armed forces to fire upon the workers, under which the national minorities were oppressed by their Czech rulers, and the Czechoslovak state was a tool in the hands of the great imperialist powers.

The Czech and Slovak peoples have no desire to return to the same or even worse conditions than those they formerly had. They wish to go forward to freedom and socialism.

What Do the Czechs and Slovaks Abroad Think?

One-sixth of all Czechs, one-third of all Slovaks, are living beyond the frontiers of the Czechoslovak Republic. Their main centre is the U.S.A., where more than two million Czechs and Slovaks have settled. These Czechs and Slovaks in America have always played a prominent part in the affairs of their respective nations. Twenty years ago it was precisely they who gave most support to Masaryk. So Benes, after his abdication in October, 1938, travelled to America in order to establish there a base for his campaign abroad. By pretending he had altered his former policy he succeeded in the spring of 1939 in gaining the support of a section of his American compatriots, for the organisation of the Czechoslovak campaign abroad.

The Czechs and Slovaks in America were carefully watching to see how Benes would carry out his mandate. When Benes

made his alliance with Osusky, when the composition of the National Committee was learned, when Benes' political line became evident and official Czechoslovak circles in London and Paris began a furious campaign against the Soviet Union, the Czechs and Slovaks in America expressed their disapproval and discontent. In January, 1940, a movement was started from Chicago, calling for a congress of Czech and Slovak people in the U.S.A., in order to examine the policy of Benes, to determine the attitude of American Czechs and Slovaks towards the problems of the home and foreign policy of the U.S.A. and to define their position in regard to the fight for national freedom. After three months of preparation, the congress met in Chicago on April 28th and 29th, 1940. Two-thirds of all Czech and Slovak organisations in the U.S.A. were represented there.

The Congress condemned the activities of Benes, and categorically denounced his political line. The Congress refused to support the war, which in its opinion could never achieve freedom for the Czech and Slovak people. Against the platform of the Benes campaign, an independent platform was proclaimed, whose central plank is the support of the people's struggle at home. The Congress declared:

"The only power we can rely on in our fight is our own strength, the strength of the working people in our country, the strength of the working people of all nations and the powerful Soviet Union. We base the cause of freedom of the Czech and Slovak peoples on the forces of peace and not of war, on the forces of progress and not of reaction."

So the Czech and Slovak workers of America have embarked on the same path as the people at home.

The resolutions of the Chicago Congress were carried among scenes of enthusiasm. A "Joint Committee of Czech and Slovak organisations and associations in the U.S.A." was set up by this Congress. It is a true representation of the Czechoslovak movement abroad in so far as it is in agreement with the aims of the people at home, and was set up by democratic election, while the Benes committee was formed by self-appointed bankers, generals and bankrupt politicians, without any election at all.

Benes and his National Committee are no longer entitled to claim America as supporting their campaign. The same holds true for the situation in England. Right from the start the Czechoslovak political refugees in England were strongly opposed to the adventurous policy of the so-called National Committee.

What New Plots Are Being Hatched?

Immediately after Petain sued for an armistice, Dr. Benes proclaimed "I myself, and my friends too, do not waver. Under no circumstances shall I turn aside from the road that I have begun to tread."

It is evident that Dr. Benes has not learned the lesson of the French collapse. He intends, as he puts it, to go on treading his old path. A great deal of fuss was made about the "reconstruction" of his National Committee, which preceded recognition by the British Government. But those who still had any illusions that Benes might expel the most hated reactionary representatives, and might give his committee some more democratic character, were bitterly disappointed. All the old reactionary members of the Committee—Osusky, Slavik, Ingr and Outrata—became members of the "Provisional Government."

Nor do the new members make a better show. Two of them, Feierabend and Necas, even served obediently under Hitler before they became "ministers" in Benes' Government.

Feierabend is a big landowner and industrialist. For years he was head of the grain monopoly, an organisation for getting cheap grain from the peasants and for selling it at a high price to the consumer. He was an admirer of the parallel Nazi organisation, the Reich Food Board (*Reichsnährstand*), and was a guest of honour at the Nazi Peasant Parade at Goslar. Up to the Nazi invasion he acted as Minister of Agriculture in the Hacha Government. Just the right man, you see, to lead an anti-Nazi revolution!

His colleague, Necas, a Social Democrat, was appointed Price-Controller-in-Chief in the Protectorate after the Nazi occupation. In this capacity he worked closely with President Hacha and Baron von Neurath. However, eight months later, after war had broken out, he went to Paris. Now he is in London as a "minister" in the Czechoslovak Government under President Benes.

Besides Necas, there are two other Social-Democratic leaders in the provisional government. Of course, Benes hoped to bamboozle the uninformed public by the manner in which he included "Socialist" leaders in this government. But his gesture will not impress the political refugees, nor the ordinary people of Czechoslovakia. For these Social-Democratic leaders have

completely lost the confidence of the masses. They are universally despised. They have a record of weakness (and treachery) similar to that of their German and Austrian comrades, and of French "Socialists" of the type of Leon Blum.

Their complete lack of principles and their utter political bankruptcy showed specially clearly after the Munich betrayal. Then they left the Labour International, turned their party into a "National Party of Labour" and, after the occupation of Prague, they calmly worked on in the so-called "National Community," the all-embracing political organisation which was led by Hacha under the patronage of the Nazis.

The case of Necas, mentioned above, is not unique. Hampl, for many years a leader of the Social-Democratic Party, is still serving under Hitler as chairman of the Czechoslovak trade unions.

The fact that "Socialists" of this brand will join forces with all kinds of reactionaries in order to form a "government" abroad, without caring a rap for the desires and opinions of the working people of their country, merely confirms their political poverty, and does not improve Benes' position among his own people in the very least.

While Benes is taking such "Socialists" under his wing and is happily basking in the recognition of the Churchill-Chamberlain Government, two Communist Members of the old Czechoslovak Parliament have been arrested and imprisoned in London. They are men who are respected and loved by thousands of refugees, for whom they were working tirelessly.

Whatever illusions of help for the liberation of the people of Czechoslovakia may have been created by the recognition of the Benes Government, they have been shattered by the arrest of these men who are remembered with affection by millions of the working people of Czechoslovakia who know them as their most reliable fellow fighters against Fascism and reaction.

Of course, such a body as the new Czech "Government" cannot satisfy the ordinary people of Czechoslovakia in any way. For the workers and peasants of these nations look forward to liberation only through Socialism. This is their way to freedom and prosperity. And seeing the momentous changes which are taking place close at hand in Eastern Europe, they realise that their hopes for a Socialist future have a very reliable foundation indeed. But the political bankrupts in London have no future at all.

The British People Have Their Word To Say

From all this it is clear that Benes, the Czech, and Osusky, the Slovak, do not represent Czechoslovak unity, but merely a reactionary alliance inimical to both nations, a dinner-party of usurpers, without any right to claim that they represent their people. The British people cannot be expected to support those whom the Czech and Slovak people regard as hostile to their interests. When they realise the true facts, the British working class will pass on Benes and his friends the same sentence as their own people are doing now.

How can the British working class help? They can demand that the British Government's official recognition of the so-called "Provisional Government" should be withdrawn; they can defend the right of Czech and Slovak political refugees to be treated as such and not to be forced to join the "army" of Benes; they can protect those who are part of the nation which is waging a great and heroic fight for her freedom; they can demand the immediate release of the imprisoned Czech Members of Parliament. Thus they can directly help the Czech and Slovak workers and peasants to win their fight for freedom.

Only in this way can lasting friendship between the British people and the peoples of Central Europe be established.

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World communism in the 20th
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